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# Evaluating the Foundation Phase

## Key Findings on Reported Impacts

Research Summary

Social research

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The Foundation Phase (introduced in 2008) provides a developmentally appropriate experiential curriculum for children aged 3-7 in Wales. The Welsh Government commissioned independent evaluation (led by WISERD) aims to evaluate how well it is being implemented, what impact it has had, and ways in which it can be improved. The three-year evaluation utilises a range of mixed methods at a national and local scale.

This is one of four papers focused on **impact**. It draws on 604 school and setting survey responses, 1,008 parent/carers survey responses, 37 Local Authority interviews, four non-maintained organisation interviews, and 357 practitioner interviews.

### Key Findings

- The majority of practitioners/key stakeholders interviewed and surveyed felt that the Foundation Phase was having a **positive impact** on children and learning, especially in schools and with reference to wellbeing, attitudes to learning and confidence.
- There was less (although still positive) consensus regarding the impact of the Foundation Phase on **literacy, numeracy**, and children identified as **advantaged** or '**more able and talented**'.
- **Boys**, children with **Special Educational Needs** and children with English/Welsh as an **Additional Language** were often reported to be benefiting the most from the Foundation Phase.
- Although most survey respondents thought that **children living in poverty** were benefiting from the Foundation Phase, some case study head teachers demonstrated a difference of opinion.
- Overall **parent/carers satisfaction** with their child's education was high, but slightly lower if their child was attending a school which was implementing the Foundation Phase to a greater degree (but only for parents of non-free school meal status children, and only in Year 1).

## Further Key Findings

Overall, the practitioners/key stakeholders interviewed and surveyed reported that the Foundation Phase was having a **positive impact** on children and learning. Indeed, a greater proportion of practitioners and key stakeholders reported positive (as opposed to negative) change in all key areas. However, this did **vary**, and often a substantial proportion of respondents reported no change.

As a group, **head teachers** were often more sceptical, and Nursery and Reception teachers generally reported more positive impact than Year 1 and Year 2 teachers.

Although many practitioners and key stakeholders were of the opinion that the Foundation Phase was cultivating **independent learners** (e.g. via peer collaboration and problem solving), others were of the opinion that children were becoming overly dependent on high adult:child ratios and high numbers of additional practitioners in the classroom.

The majority of practitioners/key stakeholders thought that the Foundation Phase was having a positive impact on children's **oracy** (but literacy, especially **writing**, was still identified as a key issue within the Foundation Phase).

Many thought there had been no impact of the Foundation Phase on children's **behaviour**, but more thought that it had got better than worse.

Most practitioners and key stakeholders were unsure whether the Foundation Phase was affecting **attendance**, but again more thought that it had got better than worse.

Standards were generally said to have improved in the '**Personal and Social Development, Wellbeing and Cultural Diversity**' area of learning, but there was no clear consensus regarding the impact of the Foundation Phase on the '**Creative Development**', '**Physical Development**', '**Knowledge and Understanding of the World**' and '**Welsh**

**Language Development'** areas of learning.

Slightly more survey head teachers and Foundation Phase leaders thought that the Foundation Phase was reducing rather than increasing **general variation in educational achievement** (i.e. overall achievement gaps).

Overall, 25% of the Year 3 teachers interviewed felt that the Foundation Phase was having a positive impact **preparing children for Key Stage 2** (19% felt the Foundation Phase was having a negative impact, and the remainder were unsure).

Most of the Year 3 teachers interviewed were unsure whether the Foundation Phase will have any impact on **Key Stage 2 outcomes**.

**Parent/carers satisfaction** with the education their child was receiving in the Foundation Phase was generally high (especially if their child was in a funded non-maintained setting or a school Nursery/Reception class).

In addition to overall satisfaction, parent/carers views of **educational provision** and their **child's progress** in the Foundation Phase was slightly less positive if their child was attending a school implementing the Foundation Phase to a greater degree (but only for parents/carers of non-free school meal status children).

Most parents/carers did not think that **Key Stage 1** was any better or worse than the Foundation Phase, but parents/carers of children in classes implementing the Foundation Phase to a greater degree were slightly less likely to think that Key Stage 1 was better than the Foundation Phase.

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